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C O N F I D E N T I A L KATHMANDU 001042

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SUBJECT: JUBILATION AS KING REINSTATES PARLIAMENT

REF: A. KATHMANDU 1034
 1B. 05 KATHMANDU 2264

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

11. (C) Seven-Party alliance leaders and people on the street declared victory for democracy following the King's April 24 late night message announcing the reinstatement of Parliament and meeting all the Parties' demands (ref A). The King called on the seven-party alliance to follow its road map "to resolve the ongoing violent conflict and other problems facing the country." The King also expressed "heartfelt condolences" to those who died or were injured in the people's movement. Early on April 25, the government resumed cell-phone service and released all political prisoners. The Parties called off their general strike, which had lasted nineteen days, and termed their planned mass rally on April 25 a "Victory Day rally." The Parties claimed the Maoists had agreed to their road map and had accepted the King's speech, but the Maoists' released a statement denouncing the King's offer and the Parties for accepting it. The Parties called for a new rally in the center of Kathmandu on April 27, to explain their roadmap to the people the day before the reinstated Parliament led by expected Prime Minister G.P. Koirala would meet. The military assured everyone that they would operate under civilian authority. End Summary.

King Agrees to Parties Demands

12. (U) On April 24, 2330 local time, the King addressed the nation. He announced the reinstatement of the House of Representatives, and returned state authority and sovereignty to the people. "Cognizant of the spirit of the ongoing people's movement as well as to resolve the ongoing violent conflict and other problems facing the country, according to the road map of the seven-party alliance, we, through this Proclamation, reinstate the House of Representatives." He called for the House of Representatives to convene on April 28 at 1300 local time in the Parliament building in Kathmandu. The King also wished a speedy recovery to those who had been injured and extended "heartfelt condolences" to

those who had lost their lives in the people's movement.
(Note: The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) confirmed security forces killed eleven demonstrators between April 6 and April 24, and continued to investigate allegations that three other people died of injuries sustained in demonstrations. End note.)

Parties Welcome Announcement, Clarify Roadmap

¶3. (C) Leaders of the seven-party alliance welcomed the King's announcement. Some people continued to urge the Parties to reject the King's offer, saying it did not go far enough because it did not call for a constituent assembly; the Parties spent the morning of April 25 drafting a calibrated response to address these concerns. K.P. Oli, CPN-UML Central Committee member, said "the King's address was positive and had opened the door for resolving the problem." He said that under the road map of the seven-party alliance, the Parliament would form an all-party government, which would hold elections to a constituent assembly after holding meaningful dialogue with the Maoists.

¶4. (C) Arjun Narsingh K.C., NC Central Committee member, said "this is a victory for the people's movement." He told Emboff that G.P. Koirala would become the Prime Minister, and that once the Parliament reconvened, it would follow the Party's road map toward a constituent assembly: forming an all-party government to negotiate with the Maoists to lay down arms, forming an interim government including the Maoists, and holding elections to a constituent assembly. He said that the Parties had called off their general strike, begun on April 6. The Parties also planned to dissolve the posts of regional and zonal commissioners, and possibly would nullify other decisions of the King's government. The Parties publicly announced that the new government intended to take legal action against government officials and security forces who had used excessive force to suppress pro-democracy demonstrations. Anil Jha, NSP-Ananda Devi Central Committee member, told Emboff that six of the seven parties had wanted to urge the Maoists to call a cease-fire and give up violence, but that the small People's Front Nepal Party had wanted to "outsmart the Maoists" and had not supported the move. Thus the alliance had decided not to call for a cease-fire at this time.

Country Celebrates

¶5. (C) Though much of the country was asleep when the King addressed the nation, thousands of jubilant people took to the streets of Kathmandu with shouts of victory late on April 24. The celebratory mood was also evident on April 25. Narsingh said the planned April 25 demonstration would now become a "Victory Day" rally. He said the Parties would hold a mass gathering at Ratna Park, in the center of Kathmandu, on April 27 to explain their road map to the people. Early on April 25, the government restored cell-phone service, suspended since April 22. With the general strike called off, Emboff observed cars and buses on the streets of Kathmandu on April 25 for the first time since April 6. Shops and businesses were also open, although there continued to be a shortage of goods as few vehicles had entered the Valley during the nineteen days of the general strike. Early on April 25, the Home Minister ordered the release of all political prisoners. As of April 24, OHCHR had recorded 491 political detainees in Kathmandu.

Maoists Reject King-Party Agreement

¶6. (C) While Party leaders assured the Ambassador late April 24 that the Maoists supported the seven-party alliance's road map, and would accept the King's announcement, Maoist Chairman Prachanda and second in command Baburam Bhattarai released a statement on April 25 rejecting the King's offer. The Maoists expressed disappointment that the Parties had not consulted the Maoists before accepting the offer, and warned

that the seven-party alliance was making a "historic mistake." The Maoists claimed that they would not stop until the sovereignty of the people was ensured by an announcement of a constituent assembly. At the same time, the Maoists restated their commitment to the 12-point understanding with the Parties, and urged the Parties to act according to the understanding. The Maoists announced a new three-point program "to provide continuity to the peaceful demonstrations": countrywide mobilization of the people through meetings and demonstrations; "public action" against "elements" who suppressed the people's movement; and, a blockade of Kathmandu and all district centers "until unconditional elections" for a constituent assembly were announced.

Maoists Are Wildcard

¶7. (C) Indian Ambassador Mukherjee cautioned the Ambassador not to react too strongly to the April 25 Maoist statement, claiming that there had been a "miscommunication" between the Maoists and the Parties. He hoped the Maoists would release a new statement halting their proposed actions once they realized that a reinstated Parliament would immediately put plans in place to move toward a constituent assembly. Separately, Party leaders assured the Ambassador they were aware that the Maoists would try to pressure them, but were confident that the Maoists would soon accept the Parties' roadmap. On April 25, Sher Bahadur Deuba, NC (D) President, thanked the Ambassador for his role in pressuring the King to act, and stressed that peace was the only way forward. Deuba explained that the people on the streets supported peace and democracy, and would not support Maoist violence. K.P. Oli, CPN-UML, agreed, telling Emboff that although the Maoists had aggressive slogans, they would realize "within one week" that the people supported the Parties' roadmap, not theirs. The Maoists would soon have to "come in line." On April 24, the Ambassador cautioned Jhala Nath Khanal, CPN-UML Central Committee member, Minendra Rijal, NC (D) Spokesman, and Ram Sharan Mahat, NC Central Committee member, that before entering into negotiations with the Maoists, the Parties should agree on their bottom line. The Ambassador stressed that if the Parties did not stick together, the Maoists would try to divide the Parties and emerge victorious from negotiations. Khanal appeared convinced that the Maoists wanted to come into the mainstream, but acknowledged the Ambassador's points. Mahat and Rijal seemed more concerned about what the Maoists would do in the coming days, though they appeared to have had assurances from India that the Maoists would not be a problem.

RNA to Follow Civilian Leaders

¶8. (C) On April 25, Chief of Army Staff Thapa told the Ambassador that he had been in contact with Party leaders to assure them that the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) would follow civilian leadership. He had also reminded the Parties that a strong army was the best guarantee of successful negotiations with the Maoists. Thapa thanked the Ambassador for helping achieve a positive outcome and in turn, the Ambassador thanked Thapa for urging the King to act. The Ambassador expressed hope that the new government would move rapidly toward democracy and peace; he suggested that as things progressed, and the RNA respected civilian leadership and human rights, it would be easier for the U.S. to move toward a more normal relationship with the RNA.

Back to the Future

¶9. (C) Bio Note: Despite poor health, octogenarian and three-time Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, remains eager to create a legacy for himself and to ensure that his family continues to play an active role in Nepali politics. Born into a politically active family of Nepalese origins in Bihar, India in the 1920's, both of Koirala's brothers served as Nepali Prime Ministers in the 1950's and early 1960's.

His daughter and other family members are seen as corrupt, and polls suggest that he is widely viewed as tainted, too. Koirala is currently living with his nephew, Dr. Shashank Koirala, whom he is grooming as a possible successor. Koirala is not a promoter of intra-party democracy, and six of the thirty-six members of the NC Central Working Committee are his relatives (ref B).

¶10. (C) Koirala has recently ignored the advice of his private physician to seek bedrest and instead has led (from home) the pro-democracy movement. However, Koirala does take frequent trips to Biratnagar to seek medical treatment. He has labored breathing and though he understands and speaks English, he often turns to an advisor for a translation. When tired, he asks the advisor speak on his behalf. G.P. Koirala was briefly imprisoned in 1948 for leading Nepal's first labor strike, and spent seven years in jail in Nepal during the 1960's for his labor activities. He joined other NC leaders in self imposed exile in India in 1971, and returned to Nepal under a general amnesty program in 1979. He played a significant role in the successful movement to restore democracy in 1990, and became the first Prime Minister under the 1990 constitution. In his first term, from May 26, 1991 to November 30, 1994, Koirala's productive parliament highlighted human rights, liberalized the economy and started an aggressive anti-narcotics program. In his second term as Prime Minister, from April 15, 1998 to May 31, 1999, he led a series of coalition governments that accomplished little. His last term, from March 22, 2000 to July 26, 2001 was plagued by intra-party strife, challenges from the opposition, and continuous allegations of corruption. We expect his failing health to hamper his ability to effectively lead the new government. End bio note.

Comment

¶11. (C) While people are dancing in the street, the devil is in the details. The new Parliament, under octogenarian Koirala's leadership, has an uphill climb to pull Nepal toward peace and economic stability. The Maoists remain a serious threat. In the coming days, we must work with the international community, i.e. particularly India, to pressure the Maoists not to derail the Parties' plan.

MORIARTY